

Tonkin Critics Rebuffed

McNamara Denies Attack Was Provoked

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Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara assailed yesterday as "monstrous" the suggestion that the Johnson Administration engaged in a "conspiracy" during the Gulf of Tonkin crisis to escalate the Vietnam war.

McNamara testified for nearly seven grueling hours in closed session before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee which is investigating the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin incident.

Reactions to the Defense Secretary's statement ranged from sharp skepticism on the part of Administration war critics Sens. J. William Fulbright (D-Ark.) and Wayne Morse (D-Ore.) to warmly expressed satisfaction by Frank Lausche (D-Ohio).

In essence, the Secretary declared:

• Two U.S. destroyers, on intelligence patrol off the North Vietnamese coast 3½ years ago, did nothing to provoke an enemy attack and were operating absolutely independently of a South Vietnamese naval operation against North Vietnam islands. The South Vietnamese action was underway at the same time.

The U.S. destroyers had "every legal right" to patrol and stayed strictly outside of North Vietnam's territorial waters at all times.

• The Johnson Administration is completely convinced that a second attack followed on the first and that, therefore, the beginning of U.S. aerial bombardment of North Vietnam's soil was a justified response.

Morse Unconvinced

But Morse emerged from the Committee room unconvinced: "It was perfectly clear that we were there with ships that never should have been there when the Administration knew that South Vietnam, with boats that we had equipped, and men that we had trained, were about to bombard North Vietnam islands . . . It was constructive aggression on our part . . . The North Vietnamese had every reason to fear what we were doing."

Sen. John Sherman Cooper (R-Ky.), after hearing McNamara, said in "hindsight," he now thought Congress "acted hastily on insufficient evidence" in voting a 1964 Tonkin Resolution which supported the President in taking all necessary measures against North Vietnam to re-

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Text of Secretary McNamara's statement on Gulf of Tonkin incidents. Page A33.

pel its attacks upon U.S. forces.

Fulbright took issue with what he termed McNamara's suddenly raised "contention" that U.S. warships had not invaded North Vietnam's territorial waters at the Gulf of Tonkin because at the time North Vietnam's territorial waters extended only three miles out, not the 12 miles it later claimed.

But Lausche termed McNamara's testimony "a compelling case." And Sen. Bourke B. Hickenlooper (R-Iowa) said he had heard nothing to change his earlier support of the U.S. military retaliation against North Vietnamese PT boat bases and other installations.

McNamara, in his testimony yesterday, said that the Administration knew from its

"intelligence sources" that North Vietnam planned in advance to attack the U.S. destroyers Maddox and Turner Joy on Aug. 2 and 4, 1964, and at one point even monitored the North Vietnamese torpedo boats stating "they had our ships under attack."

Part of Patrol

The Defense Secretary, for the first time, acknowledged that both U.S. destroyers were part of a "De Soto patrol" operation authorized in 1962 to use "visual and electronic means" to detect North Vietnam's "military activity and environmental conditions."

But he emphasized that the operations were confined to "international waters" in "open patrols" which avoided "provocative actions."

In the first incident, on Aug. 2, 1964, McNamara said the Maddox, when 28 miles off the North Vietnamese coast in daylight, was attacked by three enemy torpedo boats firing "at least three torpedoes" and using machine guns. He added that planes from the U.S. aircraft carrier Ticonderoga repelled the attack and either sank or damaged the attacking boats. After the first attack, the U.S. Administration thought North Vietnam might have made a "miscalculation or an impulsive act" and limited its response to a stern warning the next day, Aug. 3.

In the second Gulf of Tonkin incident, on Aug. 4, McNamara said, both destroyers were some 60 to 65 miles off the North Vietnamese coast at night when the Maddox radar screen detected high speed surface approaches indicating "an attack appeared imminent."

He said messages from the destroyers plus "other information of a very highly classified nature" removed all doubt that "an attack on the destroyers had in fact occurred."

Washington, which held numerous conferences on the proper response during this tense period, then decided on the air strike on North Vietnamese soil, McNamara declared.

On the timing of the U.S. response, McNamara disclosed that he was unaware that at the time the U.S. vessels were attacked for the second time, South Vietnamese naval vessels were also carrying out their second attack on North Vietnamese islands.

McNamara acknowledged that he assured the Foreign Relations Committee Aug. 6, 1964, that there was no connection between South Vietnamese naval activity and the patrol action of the U.S. vessels. He learned of South Vietnam's naval strike only after appearing before the Committee.

Confused, Maybe

McNamara acknowledged that there have been "persistent questions" as to whether or not there ever was an attack on U.S. vessels on Aug. 4 to warrant the U.S. aerial retaliation.

He said the questioners may have been confused by another Gulf of Tonkin incident, on Sept. 18, in which the U.S.

destroyers Morton and Edwards reported themselves under night attack but "no credible evidence" ever was produced.

'Monstrous' Suggestion

McNamara concluded his statement by saying:

"I must address the suggestion that, in some way, the Government of the United States induced the incident on Aug. 4 with the intent of

providing an excuse to take retaliatory action which we, in fact, took. I can only characterize such insinuations as monstrous."

McNamara said he found it "inconceivable that anybody even remotely familiar with our society and system of government could suspect the existence of a conspiracy which would include almost, if not all, the entire chain of

military command in the Pacific, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Joint Chiefs, the Secretary of Defense and his chief civilian assistants, the Secretary of State and the President of the United States."

McNamara was severely criticized by Chairman Fulbright yesterday for permitting his 21-page statement before a closed session of the

Committee to be handed out to reporters a few hours later at the Pentagon. McNamara's office countered that the Secretary decided to publish his testimony after seeing on the lunch-hour news ticker that one committee member, Sen. Eugene McCarthy (D-Wis.), a leading critic of the Administration's Vietnam policy, had reported McNamara as having testified that the U.S. destroyers had indeed penetrated North Vietnam's 12-mile territorial limits.

Fulbright said this violated a specific committee request to McNamara to hold up all publication until the hearings were completed. Fulbright said McNamara's written statement—which is all that reporters had available—doesn't "tell the whole story by any means."